

Breakfast Show on the Voice of Islam Radio

Interview with Professor Michael W. Charney, SOAS, the University of London, on the subject of the Rohingya made on 5 January 2018 8:40-8:50am GMT

[These were taken down by Professor Charney as he gave his interview, so they are a little incomplete, but an accurate record of the main questions and points]

Voice of Islam Radio: *We are speaking with Professor Michael W. Charney of SOAS, University of London. Welcome Professor Charney.*

Professor Charney: Thanks, I am happy to be here.

Voice of Islam Radio: *What makes the Rohingya situation 'a textbook example of ethnic cleansing', as described by the UN?*

Professor Charney: 700,000 Rohingyas have been forced out of Myanmar by the Burmese military...the army has killed well over 10,000...destroyed dozens of villages

There is effort to depicted what is happening in Rakhine as ethnic cleaning, physically moving an ethnic minority out of an area, from genocide, which means legally at least eliminating the existence of an ethnic group per se.

So Rohingya are being forced into Bangladesh, although many (but not most) are killed, the Myanmar government can be portrayed as just physically removing them.

However, those groups also participating, the Rakhine Buddhist communalists want to destroy the Rohingya altogether, eliminate them

The government and some “scholars” also want to erase their existence historically—that's one form of genocide as well

So [this means] different things to different interests, but all bad.

Voice of Islam Radio: *Why is that we haven't been able to do anything for the Rohingya Muslims prior to this, as the problem has existed since a long time?*

Professor Charney: The Rohingya situation has been lost in the general campaign against military dictatorship in Burma until 2010.

Anti-junta groups and ethnic were happy to ally with the Rohingya so long as as they were all against the military.

Once the military stepped aside, everyone pushed the Rohingya off into one corner of the room.

Everyone got what they wanted and moved ahead but the Rohingya were left behind despite being the most loyal of pro-NLD groups.

So, the Rohingya situation has not been so starkly unique until now despite being a problem many decades old.

Voice of Islam Radio: *Is this due to hostility to Islam?*

Professor Charney: This situation has two parts. A local regional hostility to the Rohingya but this has now morphed and combined with a larger field of Islamophobia in the Irrawaddy Valley.

Voice of Islam Radio: *Is there something about Buddhism in Burma that is different. Tibetan Buddhism is more peaceful...*

Professor Charney: I don't think Buddhism in Burma is the problem. Buddhism in Burma in the abstract and philosophical level [the teachings] are just as peaceful as Tibetan Buddhism. And a lot of Burmese, most Burmese, are against violence. The problem is the way that certain fundamentalists are using Buddhism against Muslims. It's the way Buddhism is being politicised and instrumentalised.

Voice of Islam Radio: *Yes, that's an important point to remember... What social and economic problems do the refugees face when they escape their homes?*

Professor Charney: Basically, their lives have been destroyed.

Their homes have been razed to the ground—entire villages are just gone—communities scattered, families scattered, children orphaned.

Rakhine Buddhist activists plundered whatever material goods remained behind.

You have thousands of Rohingya who have been traumatized by seeing the killing of family members, children who no longer have parents and vice versa and they will carry this with them for the rest of their lives.

These are the immediate problems.

The longer term ones were caused by discrimination in Rakhine.

The Myanmar government blocked Rohingya children from attending schools and from jobs.

So, many Rohingya are illiterate, don't even have primary education, have no marketable skills.

Again, there have been previous waves of Rohingyas and those who remained in Bangladesh from the last time have been given education and jobs training by the Bangladeshis, but the current numbers are too great to cope. Bangladesh is not a wealthy, wealthy country and this is simply beyond their resource capacity.

The other problem is poverty and the fact that when they get sent back to Myanmar, they will be kept in camps and without UN and NGO monitoring will be subjected to subhuman treatment.

Already, some Rohingya women are being forced into prostitution.

That's why sanctions are necessary.

Voice of Islam Radio: *I was going to get to sanctions. What are some of the solutions to resolving the issue, why have no sanctions been put into place even after so much bloodshed?*

Professor Charney: Sanctions have not been put into place because Myanmar is a strategic country and has valuable reserves of natural gas and other resources.

It is especially important to China's designs on the Indian Ocean. India is competing for Myanmar's favour. And the US sees Myanmar as a possible strategic partner against China

No big power wants to lose the Myanmar government, so they touch it with kid gloves and at most target sanctions against individuals, not the army per se or the state.

The best thing that can be done is for we as citizens of our own countries to use pressure on our own governments to pressure Myanmar to change the constitution, which I think is a big obstacle to solving the problem, and recognise the Rohingya as full citizens of Myanmar.

Sanctions are the only thing that will make Myanmar listen.

More immediately, we have to find ways to ensure the Rohingya are physically safe in Rakhine when they return, which I would expect could only be assured with the deployment of UN peacekeepers.

It will also be necessary to return to the Rohingya their land that was taken from them so they have a means of earning a living.

Voice of Islam Radio: Thank you. You have been listening to Michael Charney, Professor of Military and ...

Professor Charney: Professor of Asian and Military History

Voice of Islam Radio: Yes, Professor of Asian and Military History at S.O.A.S.

Professor Charney: Thanks for having me.